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The Daily 202

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Revelations that Mueller's team is

frustrated intensify pressure on Barr to release full report

Bob Mueller walks past the White House, after attending St. John's Episcopal Church for morning services, on March 24. (Cliff Owen/AP)

BY JAMES HOHMANN
with Joanie Greve and Mariana Alfaro

THE BIG IDEA: Bob Mueller's report is sounding less and less like the "complete and total exoneration"

that President Trump claims.

Ten nights after Bill Barr released a four-page letter about Mueller's still-confidential, 400-page report, two separate news stories revealed that members of the special counsel's team have told associates they are frustrated with what Trump's handpicked attorney general has held back.

This will almost certainly embolden congressional Democrats to become more aggressive about pursuing the full report, including summaries that were apparently written with the idea that they could be released right away, and escalate calls for both Barr and Mueller to answer questions on Capitol Hill.

-- "Barr told lawmakers that he concluded the evidence was not sufficient to prove that the president obstructed justice. But members of Mueller's team have complained to close associates that the evidence they gathered on obstruction was alarming and significant," Ellen Nakashima, Carol Leonnig and Roz Helderman reported last night. "**'It was much more acute than Barr suggested,' said one person ...**

"**Some members of the office were particularly disappointed that Barr did not release summary information the special counsel team had prepared** … 'There was immediate displeasure from the team when

they saw how the attorney general had characterized their work instead,' according to one U.S. official briefed on the matter. Summaries were prepared for different sections of the report, with a view that they could made public …

"During nearly two years of work, Mueller's team — which included 19 lawyers and roughly 40 FBI agents, analysts and other professional staff — worked in near silence, speaking only rarely, through public documents filed in court. **The fact that some have been confiding in recent days to associates is a sign of the level of their distress."**

The New York Times first reported on the "simmering frustrations" among some of Mueller's investigators, who have told associates that "Barr failed to adequately portray the findings of their inquiry and that they were more troubling for President Trump" than the letter indicated.

Attorney General William Barr attends a celebration of the First Step Act at the White House on Monday. (Jim Watson/AFP/Getty Images)

-- Critics speculate that Barr's breezy letter was parsed in a cynical way to create the misleading impression that the report was largely positive for Trump, and they fear that his delay in releasing more of the actual report is intentional: to cement the first impressions that might be at odds with reality. Our national poll last week found that many Americans have

already drawn conclusions, even though they've only seen a partisan's summary of it. What would the reaction have been if Janet Reno sent a four-page summary of Ken Starr's report to Congress that said she concluded Bill Clinton didn't obstruct justice but noted that Starr had laid out evidence on both sides of the question?

"I think it's inevitable that Bob Mueller is going to have to testify before Congress," House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff (D-Calif.) said last night on MSNBC. "It's been my assumption that a 400-page report has an executive summary already, and so of course it begged the question: Why did Barr feel the need to release his own summary? Why didn't he release a summary produced by Bob Mueller itself instead of trying to shape it through his own words?"

House panel votes to authorize subpoenas to obtain full Mueller report

-- No one who has been following the investigation closely was surprised that Barr said he does not personally believe Trump obstructed justice. He wrote a lengthy memo last year before being nominated, which he shared with the president's team, that challenged the legitimacy of Mueller's obstruction inquiry. This might have been a factor in him getting the job.

Barr said last week that he'll release a redacted

version of the report by mid-April, but it remains unclear how much he'll hold back. He could choose to redact liberally on the grounds that Trump wasn't charged with a crime. The Justice Department declined to comment on the frustrations of Mueller's investigators.

-- Last night's stories follow a vote yesterday by the House Judiciary Committee to authorize Chairman Jerry Nadler (D-N.Y.) to serve Barr with a subpoena for the report and the underlying investigative materials it's based on. Nadler said he's going to keep it in his pocket until he sees what Barr puts out. Court fights over redactions seem inevitable.

House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal (D-Mass.) arrives for a Democratic Caucus meeting this week at the Capitol. (J. Scott Applewhite/AP)

-- Yesterday brought other significant reminders that the investigations into Trump, his family and his businesses are cascading, not winding down:

Rep. Richie Neal (D-Mass.), the Democratic chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, asked the IRS for six years of Trump's personal and business tax returns. Trump is the first president since Richard

Nixon who has refused to release his tax returns. “The IRS was given until April 10 to respond,” Erica Werner, Damian Paletta and Josh Dawsey report. “The panel’s chairman was able to make the request because of a 1924 law that gives the chairmen of the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee broad powers to request and receive the tax returns of any American. …

“**Privately, Trump has told White House advisers that he does not plan to hand over his tax returns to Congress — and that he would fight the issue to the Supreme Court, hoping to stall it until after the 2020 election**, according to two administration officials. … Treasury officials will not comply with the request until they are compelled to do so, the officials said. … The request poses a major test for Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, who becomes the first Cabinet member in modern history tasked with deciding whether to turn over his boss’s tax returns to the opposition party.

“**It is unclear what legal argument Mnuchin could make to refuse the request, as the tax records would be unlikely to be considered protected under ‘executive privilege’ because they do not pertain to Trump’s actions during his time in the White House.** The law that allows Neal to request the returns says the treasury secretary ‘shall’ turn over the relevant records. It does not appear to give Mnuchin much wiggle room.”

-- Meanwhile, the president's New York-based accounting firm said it will respond to a request for 10 years of records related to its work with Trump if it receives a congressional subpoena. Rachael Bade reports: "House Oversight and Reform Committee Chairman Elijah E. Cummings (D-Md.) told reporters that officials with Mazars USA requested a compulsory measure before it could consider accommodating the panel's document request for information related to Trump's finances. For more than a decade, Mazars and a predecessor firm signed off on financial statements for Trump that he used when seeking loans. Some of the statements include frequent exaggerations or inaccuracies and were accompanied by a note from the firm saying it was not responsible for the accuracy of the information."

Marine One lands on the South Lawn after Bill Barr released his four-page letter about the Mueller report on March 24. (Drew Angerer/Getty Images)

-- Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, has been identified as the senior White House official whose security clearance was denied last year because of concerns about susceptibility to foreign influence, private business interests and past personal conduct. Tom Hamburger, Rachael Bade and Ashley Parker report: "Kushner was identified only as 'Senior

White House Official 1' in [Oversight] committee documents released this week describing the testimony of Tricia Newbold, a whistleblower in the White House's personnel security office who said she and another career employee determined that Kushner had too many 'significant disqualifying factors' to receive a clearance. … In her testimony, Newbold said that when Kushner applied for an even higher level of clearance, another agency contacted her to determine 'how we rendered a favorable adjudication,' an inquiry she said reflected that agency's 'serious concerns.'"

-- The House Intelligence Committee is planning to interview an organizer for Trump's inaugural committee. The Wall Street Journal's Rebecca Davis O'Brien and Rebecca Ballhaus report: "The March 19 request from the House Intelligence Committee was disclosed in a letter sent to a lawyer for the inaugural committee this week by an attorney for Stephanie Winston Wolkoff, a former adviser to first lady Melania Trump who served as a producer and a vendor for the inauguration. … The letter from Ms. Wolkoff's lawyer also revealed that the investigation by Manhattan federal prosecutors into the inaugural has been going on since at least October, when Ms. Wolkoff received a grand-jury subpoena. She has been cooperating with that investigation since then."

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WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING:

Ethiopian Transport Minister Dagmawit Moges addresses reporters at a news conference today in Addis Ababa. (Tiksa Negeri/Reuters)

-- Ethiopian authorities said pilots on the doomed flight performed Boeing's recommended procedures but were not able to stop the plane from diving. The African government ordered the American manufacturer to review the flight control system of its 737 Max 8. Paul Schemm and Luz Lazo report: "Minister of Transport Dagmawit Moges gave a brief summary and

the recommendations of the much anticipated preliminary report into the crash, in which she singled out the 'aircraft flight control system' as contributing to the plane's difficulty in flying away from Addis Ababa and then crash six minutes later ...

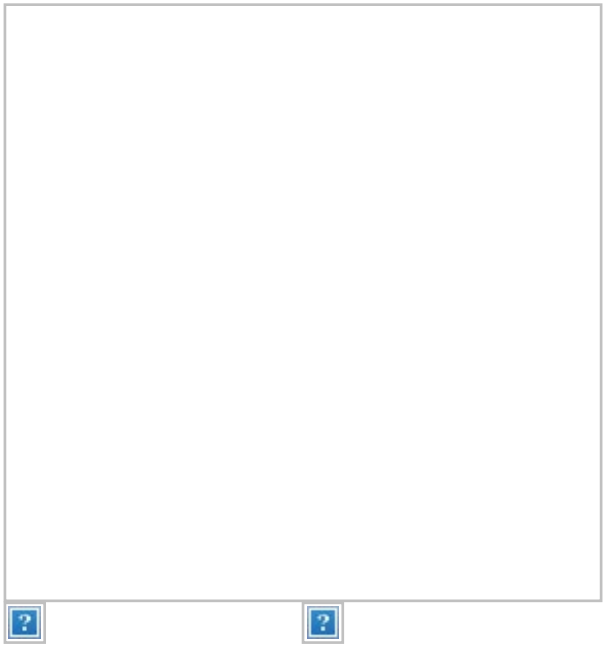
"Like the crash of an Indonesian Max 8 aircraft in October, attention in the Ethiopian Airlines crash has been zeroing in on a flight control system known as the Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System or MCAS, which pushes the nose of the aircraft down to avoid a midair stall ... [Moges] also noted that the crew "performed all the procedures repeatedly provided by the manufacturer but was not able to control the aircraft."

-- If you read one story today: "The Trump administration plans to shift much of the power and responsibility for food safety inspections in hog plants to the pork industry as early as May, cutting the number of federal inspectors by about 40 percent and replacing them with plant employees," Kimberly Kindy reports. "Under the proposed new inspection system, the responsibility for identifying diseased and contaminated pork would be shared with plant employees, whose training would be at the discretion of plant owners. There would be no limits on slaughter-line speeds. The new pork inspection system would accelerate the federal government's move toward delegating inspections to the livestock industry. The

administration also is working to shift inspection of beef to plant owners. … These proposals, part of the administration's broader effort to reduce regulations, come as the federal government is under fire for delegating some of its aircraft safety oversight responsibilities to Boeing …

"**Pat Basu, the chief veterinarian with the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service from 2016 to 2018, refused to sign off on the new pork system because of concerns about safety for consumers and livestock. The USDA sent the proposed regulations to the Federal Register about a week after Basu left.** 'Look at the FAA. It took a year or so before the crashes happened,' Basu said. 'This could pass, and everything could be okay for a while, until some disease is missed, and we have an outbreak all over the country. It would be an economic disaster that would be very hard to recover from.'"

Actresses Felicity Huffman, left, and Lori Loughlin arrive for court appearances in Boston. (Charles Krupa/AP; Joseph Prezioso/AFP/Getty Images)



GET SMART FAST:

1. **Actresses Felicity Huffman and Lori Loughlin appeared in federal court to face charges in the college admissions scandal.** Huffman, Loughlin and 10 other parents presented themselves to the judge, who read aloud the charges against each of them and established the conditions of their release, which included relinquishing their passports. (Karen Weintraub and Moriah Balingit)

2. **A Justice Department investigation found that Alabama prisons "routinely" violate Eighth Amendment protections for inmates against cruel and unusual punishment by failing to prevent physical and sexual violence.** Federal authorities also said the state's prison system often inadequately

investigates sexual assaults because it “has a tendency to dismiss claims of sexual abuse by gay prisoners as consensual ‘homosexual activity’ without further investigation, implying that a gay man cannot be raped.” (Devlin Barrett)

3. **A federal judge is expected to rule in the coming days on the FDA’s lawsuit against a stem cell company accused of repeatedly blinding patients.** Doctors first reported in 2015 that treatments from U.S. Stem Cell appeared to be causing blindness in their patients. Now the company is facing accusations from the government of “openly violating the law and endangering patients” in a case that could constrain the growing stem cell industry. (Laurie McGinley and William Wan)

4. **Israeli researchers have developed malware that can automatically add fake cancerous growths to CT or MRI scans.** The technology, which the researchers developed to draw attention to security vulnerabilities in medical imaging equipment, could also delete the appearance of cancerous nodules and lesions on scans. (Kim Zetter)

5. **An American tourist kidnapped while touring one of Uganda’s most popular safari destinations is being held for $500,000 in ransom.** Queen Elizabeth National Park, home to some 2,500

elephants, is generally regarded as safe for tourists, and authorities are looking for the 35-year-old woman and her guide, who were apparently detained by a group of gunmen. (New York Times)

6. **Six female former employees of Jones Day filed a $200 million class-action lawsuit against the law firm alleging widespread gender discrimination.** The women claimed that Jones Day's "black box" compensation model and leadership structure allowed the firm to deny its female lawyers equal pay and opportunities for advancement. (National Law Journal)

7. **A woman named Redoshi is believed to have been the last living survivor of the transatlantic slave trade.** A researcher in Britain said she discovered testimony from the woman, who survived slavery, the Civil War and the Depression. (New York Times)

8. **A 95-year-old Nazi death camp guard was found unfit to stand trial by a German court, likely ending one of the last such Holocaust prosecutions.** A court in Muenster said the man, who was accused of assisting in the murder of hundreds at Stutthof, a Nazi concentration camp, is considered permanently unfit to stand trial because of health problems. (NBC News)

9. **The cast of “Game of Thrones” walked its last red carpet before the show’s final season arrives April 14.** The series, HBO’s biggest hit, has an estimated 30 million U.S. viewers. (Reuters)

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) speaks at the Capitol in Washington. (J. Scott Applewhite/AP)

THE NEW CONGRESS:

-- Republicans unilaterally changed the rules of the

Senate to accelerate the confirmation of Trump's lower-level nominees, marking the latest demise of a significant governing norm. Paul Kane reports: "Under previous Senate orders, 30 hours of debate were required for these nominees after they had cleared a procedural vote. Now, such nominees will receive two hours of formal debate before a final confirmation roll call. In changing the rules, Republicans accused Democrats of trying to block the formation of Trump's administration and the federal judiciary by dragging out the confirmation of noncontroversial nominees merely to create procedural gridlock. Democrats countered that Trump, in conjunction with [Mitch] McConnell, has jammed the Senate with a set of historically unqualified nominees and broke with traditions of previous administrations, of both parties, in consulting with senators from the other party on many appointments. … All but two Republicans supported McConnell's rules move, with Sens. Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Mike Lee (R-Utah) opposing it." (It passed 51 to 48.)

-- "Mitch McConnell undid 213 years of Senate history in 33 minutes," Dana Milbank notes in his column. The Senate majority leader, "in his latest move to seize power by dismantling the chamber's centuries-old safeguards, was about to push through another vote to break another rule. But first he gave a speech blaming the other side. 'The Democratic leader started all of this,' McConnell proclaimed, his face blotchy red with anger.

Pointing at the Democratic leader, Charles E. Schumer (N.Y.), McConnell added: 'He started this whole thing.' … Actually, Vice President Aaron Burr started 'it' — the Senate tradition of unlimited debate, that is. That tradition has prevailed, more or less, in the Senate since 1806. Over that time, senators had the right to delay votes on presidential nominees they found objectionable. … McConnell then read out a 42-word parliamentary maneuver that jettisoned 213 years of wisdom."

-- A new book details how Trump has worked with — and occasionally clashed with — Republican lawmakers. Here are a few nuggets from Jake Sherman and Anna Palmer's "The Hill to Die On," per Ashley Parker:

- **Trump once spent a Republican retreat session on infrastructure outlining his next attack on his former chief strategist Steve Bannon**: "The president impressed the assembled lawmakers with his apparent interest in the presentation, nodding along and scribbling furious notes. … Instead, Trump had scrawled 'Sloppy Steve' atop his index card, followed by 'copious notes' criticizing [Bannon]."
- **Trump once called Rep. Steve Scalise (R-La.) to ask his opinion on choosing Mike Pence as his running mate while Pence was in the room**: **"**Scalise praised the now-vice president, who, unbeknown to him, happened to be sitting with Trump

and listening to the whole conversation. … Sherman and Palmer write that Scalise later joked he was 'an unwitting participant in the vetting of Mike Pence in front of Mike Pence!'"

- **Trump told the book's authors that he was unconcerned after Democrats won the House in 2018.** "'In Trump's thinking, a Democratic House majority was welcome, even freeing,' they write. Trump, they continue, instead said, 'Now, I just say, "Hey, folks, let's go. Give me legislation. Let me see. And if we like it, we'll work on it."'"

-- Reporter Yashar Ali highlighted a section in Sherman and Palmer's book where McConnell reacted to the Brett Kavanaugh confirmation saga: "The book says that McConnell found Ford to be 'trustworthy,' while also saying that McConnell thought 'Kavanaugh was a good man—and losing this nomination had never been an option.' … In an interview for the book, McConnell told Sherman/Palmer about a poll CNN conducted where his approval rating jumped from 30 percent to 62 percent. 'I'd never had an audience like that before. So all of these Republicans who are constantly told by radio talk show hosts and others that I'm a villain got to see a sort of different side. … So that's how it impacted me,' McConnell told Sherman/Palmer. **'I know it won't last. But for the moment, I'm a rock star.'**"

-- House Democrats passed a resolution rebuking the

Trump administration's efforts to kill Obamacare in court. John Wagner reports: "The resolution passed 240 to 186, with eight Republicans joining the chamber's Democrats in rebuking Trump. One Democrat, Rep. Collin C. Peterson (Minn.), broke ranks and voted against the resolution. With Wednesday's vote, Democrats were seeking to put Republicans on record as siding with Trump in his attempt to use the courts to overturn the ACA." **But the GOP-controlled Senate is not expected to take up the measure, making it largely symbolic.**

Trump calls alleged Mar-a-Lago intrusion a ’fluke’

TRUMP INC.

-- Mar-a-Lago has a system designed to decide who gets in and who doesn’t. That system broke down last weekend, when Yujing Zhang, a Chinese woman who was not on the approved list, managed to make it inside the resort carrying a thumb drive with malicious software. David A. Fahrenthold, Devlin Barrett, Josh Dawsey and Ellen Nakashima report: “’I’m surprised that she got in. But then again, I’m not surprised,’ said Shannon Donnelly, the longtime society columnist for the Palm Beach Daily News who has covered Mar-a-Lago for years. She described a situation in which the Secret Service is dealing with two missions, to keep the president safe and to keep his customers happy. ‘It’s bound to happen’ that people will slip through, Donnelly said.

“**Counterintelligence agents at the FBI are also looking at Zhang to see whether they can find any information that would explain her behavior, according to people familiar with the matter.** On Wednesday, Trump said he had a brief meeting about the incident but said he was not concerned about potential espionage efforts aimed at Mar-a-Lago. … On Wednesday, three top Senate Democrats asked FBI Director Christopher A. Wray to investigate whether foreign spies could exploit weaknesses at Mar-a-Lago to

steal classified information. … Intelligence officials have said a foreign spy might find Mar-a-Lago a gold mine — even if the spy never laid eyes on Trump. The club is full of Trump's friends, aides and hangers-on; it could be bugged, or its computers hacked, if someone could get in the door."

-- Federal authorities are separately investigating whether Zhang has any connection to their ongoing probe related to Li "Cindy" Yang, the former massage parlor owner who promoted events at the club. The Miami Herald's Marta Oliver Craviotto, Caitlin Ostroff and Sarah Blaskey report: "Before her arrest, Zhang was unknown to federal authorities. Now, investigators with the FBI Counterintelligence Division in South Florida are trying to figure out who Zhang is, whether she is involved in a possible Chinese intelligence mission and whether there are links to Yang's social events at Trump's Mar-a-Lago. … Investigators are examining electronic equipment that was seized from Zhang on Saturday, including the thumb drive, a laptop, one external hard drive and four cellphones. They are attempting to determine what Zhang planned to do with the malware at Trump's club and how that evidence might factor into their already existing investigation."

-- In China, a man known as "Dr. Charles" pitches himself as a conduit to American power under an organization audaciously named the United Nations

Chinese Friendship Association. And, yes, he boasts about meeting Florida's Republican governor, Ron DeSantis, and partying at Mar-a-Lago. Anna Fifield reports from Beijing: "'Dr. Charles' appears to be neither a doctor nor a Charles. And his organization, with a self-styled imprimatur of the United Nations, similarly appears to be a commercial influence-peddling operation looking for a veneer of respectability. 'Dr. Charles,' whose real name is Li Weitian, according to bank records, has become a central figure in the Chinese effort to get close to Trump and influential Republicans. He goes to the president's Florida country club so regularly that [Zhang] told Secret Service agents that she was there to meet 'her Chinese friend Charles.'"

Biden vows to be ‘more mindful’ of personal space

2020 WATCH:

-- Joe Biden promised to adjust his physical behavior as more women came forward with accounts of inappropriate interactions, bringing the total number of such alleged encounters to seven. Elise Viebeck, Matt Viser and Colby Itkowitz report: “Biden addressed critics in a video posted to Twitter as three additional women told The Washington Post on Wednesday about

encounters with him that made them feel uncomfortable. … Even on Wednesday, as Biden acknowledged shifting social norms and promised to be ‘more respectful of people’s personal space,’ he defended his style of interacting and did not offer an apology. **‘I’ll be much more mindful. That is my responsibility, my responsibility, and I’ll meet it. But I’ll always believe governing, quite frankly, and life, for that matter, is about connecting, about connecting with people. That won’t change,’ Biden said in the video.**

“**The most recent encounter described to The Post took place in 2016.** Sofie Karasek was part of a group of 51 sexual assault victims who appeared onstage at the Oscars with Lady Gaga that year; Biden had introduced the singer’s performance. Karasek said as she met Biden after the ceremony, she was thinking about a college student who had been sexually assaulted and recently died by suicide. She decided to share the story with the then-vice president, and Biden responded by clasping her hands and leaning down to place his forehead against hers, a moment captured in a widely circulated photograph. Karasek said she appreciated Biden’s support but also felt awkward and uncomfortable that his gesture had left their faces suddenly inches apart.”

-- Overnight, another woman — from the Lake Tahoe area of California — told her local paper that Biden inappropriately touched her while she worked in his

Senate office. From the Sierra Sun's Alan Riquelmy: "Alexandra Tara Reade said that in 1993 she was in her mid-20s when Biden, then a senator from Delaware, touched her several times making her feel uncomfortable. … 'He used to put his hand on my shoulder and run his finger up my neck,' she said. 'I would just kind of freeze and wait for him to stop doing that.' ... Reade said her responsibilities in the senator's office were reduced after she refused to serve drinks at an event — what she called a desire of Biden's because he liked her legs. Reade said she felt pushed out and left Biden's employ in August 1993 after some nine months."

-- Biden's video highlights his strength at projecting empathy but falls short of an actual apology. Aaron Blake explains: "Biden seems genuine and sends a rather firm message that his behavior will change. Given that the accusations against him involve not sexual assault but objectionable touching, Biden's acknowledgment will probably go a long way with Democrats who need convincing. … [But] **Biden never says he's sorry, for his actions or for how they made the women feel. Indeed, Biden essentially suggests that he is a victim of the changing times.** … We still don't know whether Biden thinks he did anything wrong, and it's a fair question to continue to ask."

-- Sen. Michael Bennet (D-Colo.) announced he has prostate cancer, an "unanticipated hurdle" he says

won't dissuade him from running for president. Allyson Chiu reports: “If he is cancer-free after the surgery, Bennet said he still plans to join the ever-growing pool of Democratic presidential hopefuls, according to the Colorado Independent. On Twitter, Bennet said he will have surgery in Colorado during the upcoming Senate recess, which starts next week. … On Wednesday, he told the Independent that he’d planned to announce ‘sometime in April.’ Then, he went in for a physical. Bennet’s prostate-specific antigen test results came back high and a biopsy showed malignancy.”

-- Rep. Tim Ryan (D-Ohio) is expected to announce his presidential campaign later this week. He will appear on “The View” before participating in a Saturday rally in Youngstown, Ohio. (BuzzFeed News)

-- Beto O’Rourke raised $9.4 million during the first quarter, putting him third among Democratic presidential hopefuls who have announced their total hauls. John Wagner reports: “O’Rourke’s campaign emphasized that his total reflected 18 days in the race, fewer than most contenders, and that he did not take money from political action committees, lobbyists or corporations. … O’Rourke’s campaign said it relied heavily on small donors and that 98 percent of contributions were below $200. The average donation was $43, the campaign said.”

-- O’Rourke said he would sign legislation to study reparations if he wins. O’Rourke told Al Sharpton he supports a bill from Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Tex.) to create a commission to study and develop reparations for America’s black community. (HuffPost)

Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta testifies on Wednesday during a House Appropriations Committee hearing on his department's budget. (Al Drago/Getty Images)

PERSONNEL IS POLICY:

-- Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta was confronted by House Democrats over his decision as a federal prosecutor to sign off on a lenient plea deal in a sex trafficking case involving multimillionaire Jeffrey Epstein. Kimberly Kindy, Felicia Sonmez and Lisa Rein report: "'You chose wealthy and well-connected people, child rapists, over the victims in this case,' said Rep. Katherine M. Clark (D-Mass.), who noted that 'the hideous truth has come out' about Acosta's role in the case. … 'This isn't the first time you have ignored human trafficking,' Clark said. 'If you as U.S. attorney could not fight for these girls, how, as secretary of labor, can you tell this panel and the American people that you can responsibly oversee this budget [and] the Department of Labor, including human trafficking?' … **Acosta argued that Epstein would have faced even lighter punishment had the plea deal not been struck**. 'I understand the frustration,' he said. 'I think it's important for people to know he was going to get off with no jail time or restitution. It was the work of our office that resulted in him going to jail. It was the work of our office that resulted in him having to register as a sex offender.'"

-- The lobbying firm that previously employed acting interior secretary David Bernhardt saw a surge in revenue from clients hoping to influence the agency as soon as he left its upper ranks. Dino Grandoni and Juliet Eilperin report: "Over the past three years …

Bernhardt's former firm Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck has quadrupled its business related to Interior. … The striking uptick in the amount of lobbying revenue could provide fuel to Bernhardt's critics as he heads toward a confirmation vote before a Senate committee on Thursday."

-- Two Democratic senators demanded documents from the Consumer Product Safety Commission's acting chairwoman, Ann Marie Buerkle, after a Post story revealed that regulators backed off a threat to recall a stroller despite hundreds of accidents and instead reached a settlement with Britax. Todd C. Frankel reports: "Sens. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) and Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.) — who voted against Buerkle's nominations in the committee — said later in a statement they hoped the documents 'would reveal the extent of her role in undermining product safety investigations and other potential wrongdoing.' … Buerkle released a statement Wednesday that called The Washington Post article 'misleading,' adding that the agency's settlement with Britax 'advances consumer safety.'"

-- The Nuclear Regulatory Commission said staffers from its international division were consulted about the Trump administration's desire to share sensitive nuclear information with Saudi Arabia, even though agency commissioners said they had no knowledge

of the technology transfers. Steven Mufson reports: “Energy Department spokesman Shaylyn Hynes also said that the ‘NRC staff was consulted, and had no objections to the recommendations, before these authorizations were granted.’ **Neither agency would say when or to what companies the authorizations were granted.** The agencies were pushing back after a hearing of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, where Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) asked whether the commission had been consulted and whether it had raised concerns given tensions in U.S.-Saudi relations. NRC Chairman Kristine L. Svinicki said she did not know. Neither did her four colleagues on the commission.”

Trump on closing border: 'Security is more important to me than trade'

THE IMMIGRATION WARS:

-- Trump's threat to shut down the southern border continues to dog American businesses and Homeland Security agencies as the president shifts his ultimatum from the Mexican government to American lawmakers. Nick Miroff, Damian Paletta and Kevin Sieff report: "A day after Trump appeared to back away from the shutdown idea while praising tougher

enforcement efforts in Mexico — the original target of his threat — the president said he would close the 2,000-mile boundary unless Congress 'immediately' addresses 'loopholes' in U.S. immigration law that he says are leading to a wave of families traveling from Central America. … The president gave no timetable for his demand. **Two senior administration officials said Wednesday they believe Trump's determination to act imminently had cooled.**"

-- Federal immigration authorities arrested more than 280 employees at a company in Allen, Tex., who were allegedly working in the U.S. unlawfully, in what officials said was the biggest single workplace raid in the past 10 years. NBC News's Phil Helsel reports: "CVE Group Inc. is a New Jersey-based company that refurbishes and repairs consumer tech products and has a national receiving center in North Texas. … Relatives of workers came to the facility after word of the operation spread, some emotional and wondering about their loved ones."

-- California Attorney General Xavier Becerra (D) said illegal immigration should be decriminalized. HuffPost's Roque Planas and Angelina Chapin report: "The remarks from California's top law enforcement officer are rare even from a Democratic politician, although the idea is picking up steam. … Decriminalizing immigration wouldn't mean that crossing the border

without authorization would go unpunished. Becerra acknowledged that those who do so violate civil laws and skirt the normal process for entering. But criminally charging people with immigration violations in addition to putting them through deportation proceedings serves to brand migrants as criminals, he said, whether or not they commit acts of violence or property crimes. ‘If you call them criminals, it’s a lot easier to get people to turn against them than if you call them undocumented immigrants,’ Becerra said.”

-- U.S. builders and farmers are asking to let more immigrants in because they're facing worker shortages. The New York Times’s Eduardo Porter reports: “The tightest labor market in more than half a century is finally lifting the wages of the least-skilled workers on the bottom rung of the labor force, bucking years of stagnation. But to hear builders tell it, the rising cost of their crews reflects a demographic reality that could hamstring industries besides their own: Their labor force is shrinking. Trump’s threat to close the Mexican border only adds to the pressure."

Central American migrants, part of the caravan hoping to reach the U.S. border, take a break in Acacoyagua, Mexico, last Thursday. A caravan of about 2,500 Central Americans is making its way through Mexico's southern state of Chiapas. (Isabel Mateos/AP)

THE CLIMATE WARS:

-- "How Climate Change is Fuelling the U.S. Border Crisis," by the New Yorker's Jonathan Blitzer: "There are always a lot of reasons why people migrate," said Yarsinio Palacios, an expert on forestry in Guatemala.

“Maybe a family member is sick. Maybe they are trying to make up for losses from the previous year. But in every situation, it has something to do with climate change.”

-- A bipartisan group of 19 senators called for “robust” funding of federal programs to support wind energy a day after Trump claimed that the noise from wind turbines can cause cancer. John Wagner reports: “A letter, spearheaded by Sens. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) and Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa), to an appropriations panel noted that the wind industry employs more than 100,000 U.S. citizens and said funding was needed ‘to ensure America remains a leader in wind energy technology.’ Those who signed the letter, including five Democratic presidential candidates, did not mention Trump’s comments at a fundraising dinner on Tuesday. But **in a call with reporters, Grassley called the president’s comments ‘idiotic,’** according to the Des Moines Register.”

-- Gaslighting alert: Trump’s reelection campaign is trying to make a list of “climate change victories” in swing states that the president can take credit for during the 2020 campaign. McClatchy’s Michael Wilner reports: “White House officials have liaised with the Environmental Protection Agency on behalf of the campaign seeking a concrete list of accomplishments … And campaign officials are encouraging the president to begin racking up visible environmental victories specific

to battleground states, such as Michigan and Florida, critical to Trump's reelection bid and where climate change has increased in importance to voters. 'I can confirm that the campaign is unduly interested in collecting a string of wins on this,' said a second source familiar with the campaign, citing the president's commitment in Michigan last week to funding the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and, days later, to infrastructure repairs to Lake Okeechobee's Herbert Hoover Dike in Florida. 'In Trump world, the hope is to find enough basic environmental and climate wins in places where he needs to perform well,' the source said."

-- Climate change has severely hampered the Great Barrier Reef's ability to recover from increasingly common ocean heat waves. New research published in the journal Nature details how the Australian coral reef has suffered four mass "bleaching events" in the past 20 years, including back-to-back episodes in 2016 *and* 2017. (Brady Dennis)

Jens Stoltenberg's address to Congress, in less than 4 minutes

THE NEW WORLD ORDER:

-- As he addressed Congress, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg made a case for the survival of the transatlantic alliance, appealing not to the bipartisan group in front of him but to Trump, who wasn't in the room. Anne Gearan and Karoun Demirjian report: "Stoltenberg aimed much of his … speech at answering President Trump's skepticism and

occasional hostility toward the alliance, while throwing in some praise of the president as well. … 'We have to be frank,' Stoltenberg said. 'Questions are being asked on both sides of the Atlantic about the strength' of NATO. That was an oblique reference to open speculation among allies about whether Trump's standoff with traditional partners such as Germany poses an existential threat to the alliance. [He] nodded at other criticisms of the alliance that go beyond those raised by Trump. Apparently addressing European pacifist distrust of defense spending, Stoltenberg said that 'peaceful protest' and 'dialogue' have not stopped aggressors from Adolf Hitler to Joseph Stalin to the Islamic State."

-- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel hasn't ruled out the option of reoccupying Gaza. Netanyahu said that Israel hasn't recaptured the area because, once it does, it would have to rule over the 2 million Palestinians living there. (Jerusalem Post)

-- U.S. national security adviser John Bolton is attempting to contain China's growing influence on the U.N. and other international organizations. Foreign Policy's Colum Lynch reports: "At the U.N., U.S. diplomats are under instructions to foil Beijing's bid to burnish its soft power credentials and promote Chinese President Xi Jinping's philosophical precepts … They have orders to scrub Chinese buzzwords or phrases … from U.N. resolutions. The U.S.

concern, which is shared by some of its European colleagues, is that China is seeking to gradually alter the language of U.N. diplomacy to conform with its own diplomatic vision. … [U.S. diplomats] are also charged with rolling back China's effort to secure international diplomatic backing for Xi's signature Belt and Road Initiative, a trillion-dollar economic cooperation program designed to revitalize the famed Silk Road trade route that once linked China and the West."

-- British Prime Minister Theresa May has enraged her party by negotiating with opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn to work out Brexit together. William Booth, Karla Adam and Michael Birnbaum report: "May's dramatic swerve across her own red lines threatens to tear her beloved Conservative Party apart, as fellow Tories on Wednesday heaped scorn upon their leader for sitting down with an opponent they daily excoriate as a leftist menace. Hard-line Brexiteers on May's right are not only enraged that she seeks compromise with Corbyn, but they also fear she will agree with the Labour Party's vision for an ultrasoft version of Brexit. … Corbyn called this first sit-down 'useful but inconclusive.' He complained that May's position had not changed as much as he had expected. He also said May 'remained resistant' when he mentioned a second referendum. They plan to meet again on Thursday."

- Police in Britain, fearful that inflammatory rhetoric

might fuel Brexit tensions, have amassed a reserve of 10,000 officers to deal with potential unrest in the event of no deal. (The Guardian)
- Cabinet ministers must come up with a plan to keep planes flying to North America and maintain British troops in Bosnia legally in case there is no exit deal. (The Guardian)
- British civil servants are being offered counselling support for any stress caused by the potential of a no-deal Brexit. (BBC)

SOCIAL MEDIA SPEED READ:

Mayor Pete plans a formal campaign kickoff on April 14:

One of Trump's congressional allies pushed back against Democratic requests for the full Mueller report:

Democrats on the House Appropriations Committee swung back against Wilbur Ross's refusal to appear before the panel:

A New Yorker writer noted this uncomfortable moment from the vice president's NATO speech:

A Post reporter listed popular rally chants:

Celebrities will join the Clintons on their road show:

And “The Daily Show” looked back on a past administration's scandal:

GOOD READS FROM ELSEWHERE:

-- BuzzFeed News, "Old, Online, And Fed On Lies: How An Aging Population Will Reshape The Internet, " by Craig Silverman: "Although many older Americans have, like the rest of us, embraced the tools and playthings of the technology industry, a growing body of research shows they have disproportionately fallen prey to the dangers of internet misinformation and risk being further polarized by their online habits. While that matters much to them, it's also a massive challenge for society

given the outsize role older generations play in civic life, and demographic changes that are increasing their power and influence. … This age group is moving online and onto Facebook in droves, deeply struggling with digital literacy, and being targeted by a wide range of online bad actors who try to feed them fake news, infect their devices with malware, and steal their money in scams. Yet older people are largely being left out of what has become something of a golden age for digital literacy efforts."

-- New Yorker, "The Day the Dinousaurs Died," by Douglas Preston: "A few years ago, scientists at Los Alamos National Laboratory used what was then one of the world's most powerful computers, the so-called Q Machine, to model the effects of the impact. The result was a slow-motion, second-by-second false-color video of the event. Within two minutes of slamming into Earth, the asteroid, which was at least six miles wide, had gouged a crater about eighteen miles deep and lofted twenty-five trillion metric tons of debris into the atmosphere. Picture the splash of a pebble falling into pond water, but on a planetary scale. When Earth's crust rebounded, a peak higher than Mt. Everest briefly rose up. The energy released was more than that of a billion Hiroshima bombs, but the blast looked nothing like a nuclear explosion, with its signature mushroom cloud. … If one looks at the Earth as a kind of living organism, as many biologists do, you could say that it was shot by a

bullet and almost died. Deciphering what happened on the day of destruction is crucial not only to solving the three-metre problem but also to explaining our own genesis as a species."

-- USA Today, "You elected them to write new laws. They're letting corporations do it instead," by Rob O'Dell and Nick Penzenstadler: "Each year, state lawmakers across the U.S. introduce thousands of bills dreamed up and written by corporations, industry groups and think tanks. Disguised as the work of lawmakers, these so-called 'model' bills get copied in one state Capitol after another, quietly advancing the agenda of the people who write them. … USA TODAY and the Republic found at least 10,000 bills almost entirely copied from model legislation were introduced nationwide in the past eight years, and more than 2,100 of those bills were signed into law. … The investigation examined nearly 1 million bills in all 50 states and Congress using a computer algorithm developed to detect similarities in language. … For lawmakers, copying model legislation is an easy way to get fully formed bills to put their names on, while building relationships with lobbyists and other potential campaign donors."

HOT ON THE LEFT:

"Ellen DeGeneres

HOT ON THE RIGHT:

"Republican

Boycotts Sultan Of Brunei's Hotels Amid Launch Of Anti-Gay Laws," from HuffPost: "Ellen DeGeneres told fans to boycott several hotels owned by the Sultan of Brunei on Tuesday ahead of Brunei's anti-gay law going into effect on Wednesday. 'Tomorrow, the country of #Brunei will start stoning gay people to death. We need to do something now,' wrote DeGeneres on Twitter. 'Please boycott these hotels owned by the Sultan of Brunei. Raise your voices now. Spread the word. Rise up.' Brunei fully implemented a new

leadership-affiliated group targets Ilhan Omar," from CNN: "A political organization closely aligned with the Republican establishment is launching an advertising campaign this week to take on freshman Democratic Rep. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota over her comments earlier this year that were widely condemned as anti-Semitic. An official from American Action Network, a conservative advocacy nonprofit group, [said] the organization will spend six figures on digital ads that criticize Omar for questioning the allegiance of

Sharia penal code on Wednesday, effectively making sodomy between two men or unmarried heterosexual couples punishable by stoning to death or whipping with 100 strokes, according to Australia's ABC News. The same punishment goes for those who commit adultery."

members of Congress who support the state of Israel. … The crop of ads suggests the beginning of an effort by the GOP establishment to make Omar, along her fellow outspoken freshmen Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib, the new boogeywomen of the Democratic Party."

DAYBOOK:

Trump will participate in a White House Opportunity and Revitalization Council meeting and receive his intelligence briefing before meeting with the Chinese vice premier.
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QUOTE OF THE DAY:

"You know how those things change. One year, coffee's good for you. The next year, coffee causes cancer." — Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds (R), declining to say during a news conference whether she thinks Trump is wrong to say that wind turbines cause cancer. Iowa gets more than a third of its electricity from wind, more than any other state. (Des Moines Register)

NEWS YOU CAN USE IF YOU LIVE IN D.C.:

-- The Nationals beat the Phillies 9-8, thanks to a walk-off walk that ended Philadelphia's undefeated four-game record. (Jesse Dougherty)

-- Richmond is once again being engulfed by the scandals weighing down Virginia's top three Democrats after Lt. Gov Justin Fairfax said he has asked prosecutors to investigate the two sexual assault allegations against him. Laura Vozzella and Antonio Olivo report: "Fairfax (D) made a lengthy statement before television cameras — and handed out a report on two polygraph examinations that he said he voluntarily took and passed — as lawmakers gathered in Richmond for the day to wrap up business from this year's legislative session. … As some lawmakers were still arriving at the Capitol, House Majority Leader Todd

Gilbert (R-Shenandoah) held a news conference to call attention to some outstanding mysteries surrounding [Gov. Ralph] Northam's scandal, and to highlight reluctance by Democrats to hold a public hearing with Fairfax's accusers."

-- Archbishop Wilton Gregory of Atlanta will become the new archbishop of Washington. The Washington archbishop is traditionally made a cardinal, which would make Gregory the first black American to hold that position and to thus be eligible to vote for the next pope. He will replace Cardinal Donald Wuerl, who resigned in October over complaints about his handling of sexual abuse claims. (Chico Harlan, Michelle Boorstein, Julie Zauzmer and Stefano Pitrelli)

-- Members of Congress objected to the National Park Service's proposal to charge people who protest on the Mall, an idea rejected by many activist organizations on the left and right. Marissa J. Lang reports: "With the number of demonstrations on the rise, stretching the department's resources, Park Service acting director Dan Smith said the agency wanted to test the waters of public opinion, but he said no decision has been made as to how the Park Service might recover costs. … Several groups said they hoped Smith would commit to abandoning the proposal during Wednesday's hearing, but he said the idea is still in the 'review phase.' … **About 750 First Amendment demonstrations**

converge on the Mall annually, according to the Park Service. … The agency does not track how much it spends to support demonstrations, though spokesman Mike Litterst said, on average, processing permits alone costs the Park Service about $700,000 annually in staff time.”

VIDEOS OF THE DAY:

Samantha Bee delved into America's growing pile of antiabortion bills:

Bee's correspondents, the Lucas Brothers, went to the Met to try to figure out why white supremacists feel so attached to the ancient statues featured there:

Stephen Colbert said Americans are “on the edge of the middle of their seats” waiting for the possible release of the Mueller report:

And this 2015 video of Pete Buttigieg playing the piano at a Ben Folds concert is making the rounds again as the South Bend, Ind., mayor wades into the 2020 waters:

Folds complimented the mayor's playing abilities, saying: “It was a very difficult song he pulled off. I’m serious. He’s a fine player.”

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